



Bystander Intervention

What's the issue?

Many Sailors aren't sure when or how to get involved when they are witness to uncomfortable public situations, such as sexual assault.

What's going on?

A fleet master chief recently circulated his comments on an incident involving a female Sailor in San Diego. She was being harassed by a male Sailor from another command, in public at a bachelor housing unit. The situation escalated from verbal to a physical sexual assault.

Other Sailors were there but didn't seem to know whether they should step in or mind their own business. To her credit, one of them (a female) did the right thing: she intervened, escorted the victim away from the scene, and then convinced her to call the base police.

Sooner or later, you will be in a situation where you have to choose whether to get involved in an unfolding situation. Maybe you witness an accident and should call for help. Maybe a shipmate is in trouble. Maybe someone you know or work with is about to do something dangerous, dumb or hostile.

Do you speak up? The fact of the matter is, usually, you should. If you speak up, you can keep others from getting hurt, hurting someone

else, or getting in trouble. Intervening may make you uncomfortable, but that is one of the prices of maturity and responsibility.

What's the solution?

Realize that you may have to intervene and be ready to do it. Make your standards and limits known to your friends. Tell them you aren't going to look the other way.

Don't hesitate to speak up if you see a potential victim in a hostile situation. The longer you wait to get involved, the more out of control feelings and actions can spiral.

Appreciate the power of peer pressure. It isn't fool-proof, but it can be surprisingly effective. It is hard to deal with someone who is drunk or angry, but calm heads can help settle emotions.

Discussion items and open questions

1. Can you tell the difference between flirting and harassment?
2. When was the last time you were confronted with a problematic situation and decided to mind your own business? Why did you make that decision?
3. Similarly, when was the last time you decide to get involved in a situation? Why did you do so? What were the results?

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